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45 graduate from latest Drug Court class

By Sheryl Krieg, skrieg@news-sentinel.com
Monday, December 12, 2016 01:44 pm

The audience was cheering and clapping as each name was read by Allen Superior Court Judge Fran Gull Monday afternoon in the courtroom. Definitely not a typical day in the Allen County Courthouse, but nothing was typical about each of the 45 graduates of Criminal Division Services' 42nd class of Drug Court. Twenty-eight of the grads had just completed the program on Monday.

Although a criminal charge brought them all together, their completion of the program is a testament to the hours of counseling and coping skills they've learned to stay off alcohol and drugs.

Gull, who was all smiles and said she'd miss them, asked them to keep in touch to update her on their progress. As she handed out certificates, representatives from the various social and governmental agencies handed out gifts and shook the graduates' hands. Gull called the event "a wonderful celebration."

While most only accepted their diploma and paperwork to dismiss their felony convictions, some thanked God and their respective social agency for not giving up on them.

One man said he had battled substance abuse for 25 years. Another woman said she wasn't a fan of Drug Court at first, but it showed her she didn't have to wallow in despair.

Sara Clagg, a substance abuse therapist at the Otis R. Bowen Center for Human Services, delivered the keynote address and spoke about her addiction to alcohol and offered words of encouragement to the grads as she told them she resisted help, even from her family. "An addict doesn't make someone a bad person," she said. "I came from a good family. I thought I was bad. I now have the respect of my family and friends."

George Wilson, co-director of Freedom House, closed the ceremony with testimony about his battle with alcohol — calling Drug Court "one of those finite things in your life." He also said, "Recovery is a present-tense word. My real friends are the ones I met in recovery."

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